

Angry Costa Mesa officials said Thursday they will oppose Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's plan to sell the OC Fair & Event Center and refuse to rezone the property, possibly making it worth far less to prospective buyers.

The fairgrounds are one of seven "high-value" state landmarks the governor proposed selling to raise as much as \$1 billion for the cash-strapped state government. Another landmark named is the Los Angeles Coliseum.

"We're not feeling too good about the governor today," said Costa Mesa City Manager Allan Roeder. "The city of Costa Mesa is not going to change the zoning and land use of the Orange County fairgrounds. It's now zoned as open space, and it's our intention to keep it like that."

The City Council has said it would not rezone the property ever since then-state Sen. John Campbell proposed selling the fairgrounds in 2004.

"I believe the City Council would be very solid on keeping it institutional," Mayor Allan Mansoor said.

Without rezoning, any private investor interested in buying the fairgrounds would be looking at an open field with little or no prospects for commercial development, a far cry from the up to \$180 million estimated value in the governor's budget.

Mansoor said he doesn't support selling "the heart of the community" just to balance a budget and called the governor's plan a bluff.

"This is just scare tactics by the governor. He's playing the role of the big bad wolf, saying, 'I'll huff and puff and blow your house down if you don't vote for my borrow-and-tax initiatives,'" he said.

"I feel like I'm being held up and need to call 911," he added.

Orange County lawmakers, however, generally support the idea. State Sen. Bob Huff, R-Diamond Bar, said many state properties are underperforming and might be busier and generate more sales tax revenues under private ownership.

Assemblyman Jose Solorio, D-Santa Ana, also said the idea has merit but added he'd like to see the governor "collaborate" with Orange County officials on the idea.

Orange County Fair Board members, whom the governor appoints, said state officials told them to keep operating on a "business as usual" basis.

On a Thursday morning conference call, President Julie Vandermost said state officials said a potential sale would take some time. "It's important that the public know that nothing has changed. Everything is status quo," she said.

Fair officials are preparing this weekend for a popular off-road exhibition show.

And across the state, other fairs are looking into the restrictions on their deeds. Many of those fairgrounds were donations by families to the state and may have title restrictions, said Stephen Chambers, executive director of the Western Fairs Association.

"It's important that the public understand that the state didn't buy this land, but instead it was donated locally," Chambers said.

Orange County fair officials are preparing to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the fairgrounds, which the U.S. military donated.